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The Polish Foreign Ministry--Very Interesting but Confusing

Confusion, tension, and uncertainty, born of the current purges, are especially rampant in the "leaderless" Polish Foreign Ministry.

According to a former Polish Press Agency correspondent in New York, Foreign Minister Rapacki's rumored 3 April resignation has not yet been accepted, but he has been "on strike" since that date, when he refused an "order" to fire Deputy Minister Naszkowski. Rumors of Naszkowski's dismissal continue, although he was still present on May Day rostrum and identified by title. Moreover, veteran Director General Maria Wierna has been purged, and another Director, Ogrodzinski, is gravely ill. Rumors have it that at least seven Ambassadors will soon be replaced. Finally, hardliner Kazimierz Sidor, a former ambassador to the UAR, is now a strong contender to succeed Rapacki.

Rapacki has long been genuinely ill and his temporal and political demise are probably not far off. Wierna and Naszkowski, both tough, pro-Soviet Jews, probably have been fired, but the latter may be kept on until Rapacki's successor is found. Sidor's name has been mentioned before

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Czechoslovaks Press US on Gold Question

A formal Czechoslovak note handed to the US on 2 May reportedly terms the US attitude on the question of the return of Czechoslovakia's confiscated gold "irresponsible and unacceptable."

The note reiterates Prague's demand that the US return the gold and also compensate Czechoslovakia for the forced sale of a steel rolling mill. The note pointed out that the US and Czechoslovakia had reached an agreement on the gold question in 1964, but Washington subsequently refused to sign it. It also renewed the Czechoslovak government's offer to discuss on a separate basis US claims and other outstanding financial and economic questions.

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The note, which probably was written some time ago, may have been released on 2 May to serve as a partial reply to the State Department's 1 May statement. A Foreign Office spokesman apparently attempted to assuage US fears that displaying a sympathetic attitude would be disadvantageous to Prague by pointing out that returning the gold "could in no way be interpreted as interference into Czechoslovakia's internal affairs either in Czechoslovakia or anywhere else."

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Ulbricht Calls for a "New Initiative" in European Security

In a 2 May speech before the SED Central Committee, Walter Ulbricht said that "the SED considers urgent, a new initiative with the object of cooperation between the communist parties, the social democrat parties, the trade unions and other social organizations of the European countries for the bringing about of European Security." Ulbricht's approach includes proposed discussions of the situation in general and of the possibilities of attaining "partial demands" in the European Security movement.

Although Ulbricht's New Year's address included a call for official discussions with various government and functional bodies of the Federal Republic, this is the first time he has expanded the formula to include other European countries.

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Czechoslovak Airport Workers Plan Strike

The staff of the high-voltage electrical engineering workshops at Ruzyně airport in Prague announced on 24 April that a five-hour protest strike will take place on 6 May.

According to the Czech trade union daily, Prace, if the strike takes place all Czechoslovak and foreign aircraft will be prevented from taking off or landing. The workers have planned the strike to force the transport ministry to provide adequate working and hygienic facilities for the electrical engineers at Ruzyně. Representatives of a strike committee were to meet with a deputy transport minister on 26 April, but there have been no reports that the strike has been cancelled.

The planned strike illustrates again that Czechoslovak workers are taking advantage of the "democratization" process to press their demands, which had long been either

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unheeded or denied by the Novotny regime. The airport workers were probably quite gratified when the newly-elected chairman of the Czechoslovak Council of Trade Unions, Karel Polacek, declared on 24 April that the unions could not give up their right to strike "as an extreme means against gross violation of the rights of the working people."

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New York Times to Open Office in Prague

Times correspondent Richard Eder informed the Embassy in Prague on 11 April that the Czechoslovaks had welcomed the paper's decision to open a one-man office in Prague. On the basis of his preliminary discussions with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, Eder said he foresees no difficulties other than those expected problems connected with acquiring adequate housing and office facilities.

Earlier the Times planned a three-way personnel switch involving Tad Szulc moving from Madrid to Warsaw, Jonathan Randal moving from Warsaw to Prague, and Eder going from Belgrade to Madrid. Because Szulc was refused a Polish visa, he apparently will go to Prague and Randal may remain in Warsaw.

Senior UPI official Wellington Long, who has been covering the Prague scene for some weeks, has stated that he is strongly recommending opening a UPI office in Prague. Long expects this recommendation to be accepted.

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